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ABSTRACT

This paper lists guidelines approved by the Illinois State Board of Education for improving alcohol and drug education in the schools. Statistics point out the seriousness of alcohol and drug abuse in terms of human costs to the victim, his/her family, and associates, and the economic costs of health care, accident losses, crime, social programs, and lost production. The paper discusses the educational philosophy behind the program and suggestions for its administration including guidelines for handling incidents involving alcohol and drugs. Specific objectives and techniques are described which can help students incorporate knowledge into values, attitudes, and habits. Although geographically specific, these materials could serve as a model for the development of similar guidelines. (JAC)

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Improving Alcohol/ Drug Education In Illinois Schools

Illinois State Board of Education

Program Planning and Development

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Donald F. Muirheid, Chairman
Donald G. Gill, State Superintendent of Education

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING DRUG/ALCOHOL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

The Illinois State Board of Education approved recommendations for improving drug/alcohol education in Illinois schools on April 3, 1980. The preamble of the Board resolution follows:

The State Board of Education recognizes that alcohol/drug use and abuse is a major health problem in Illinois and the entire nation.

Alcohol/drug abuse imposes tragic costs on the nation, the state, and each citizen. The human costs to the victim, his/her family, friends, and associates are even more appalling. Alcohol/drug abuse is a major factor in the incidence of child abuse, need for public assistance, public health problems, traffic accidents, and crime.

The increase in the use and abuse of alcohol/drugs by young people and adults has reached staggering proportions; yet, many communities fail to accept the reality of the problem or, erroneously, hope that the problem will miraculously subside. This attitude can no longer be justified in the face of the evidence.

Research indicates the increasing magnitude of alcohol/drug abuse as a major public health problem. The following representative items are adapted from material provided by the Illinois Departments of Public Health and Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities.

It is estimated that 300,000 Illinois students have alcohol/drug-related problems; that American teen-agers consumed $16 million worth of alcohol during 1971-1975; that 50 percent of homicides involve alcohol; and that 35 percent of suicides are alcohol/drug related.

Numerous research studies conducted over the past three years on alcohol use by youths confirm the fact that students are drinking earlier and more openly. Alcohol use is not infrequent among elementary students.

The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare estimates that 20 teen-agers are killed in motor vehicle accidents each day. These accidents are often caused by impaired driving due to alcohol use.

Finally, the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) now estimates the financial cost of alcohol-related problems to the nation's economy at $42.75 billion: $19.64 billion is attributed to lost production, $12.7 billion to health care, $5.14 billion to motor vehicle accident losses, $2.86 billion to losses caused by violent crimes, $1.94 billion to the cost of social programs, and $.47 billion to fire losses.

The Illinois State Board of Education believes that the time has come to join with local districts and appropriate agencies at all levels to develop dynamic and innovative prevention programs which attack the problem in a realistic manner.

Alcohol/drug education in schools must concern itself with attitudes, values, and behaviors relative to the use or nonuse of these substances. The State Board of Education believes that a primary purpose of such education is to assist youths in making wise personal decisions relative to all matters of health and safety.

PHILOSOPHY

A primary responsibility of education is to provide students with educational experiences and skills which will enable them to function in a society which is changing rapidly.

Since the use of alcohol/drugs has been increasing among school-age youths, Illinois schools have a responsibility to provide an instructional program which will assist students to incorporate sound attitudes, values, and behaviors into their patterns of daily living.

The following items should be helpful to district personnel and boards of education in developing a philosophy for alcohol/drug education.

1. Alcohol is the most widely abused drug in contemporary society. It is used and abused for many of the same reasons as other drugs.

2. In dealing with youth, the following are important:

   A. Teachers and other adults who wish to work successfully with students must develop a genuine caring relationship for youths and their concerns and problems.

   B. Discussion groups composed of unrelated parents and youths promote objectivity and reduce the possibility of parent-child confrontation.

   C. Many health authorities feel that the years 6-12 are the most difficult. Many problem children have had traumatic experiences during the middle years. Parents and teachers should serve as buffers during the middle years.

3. People must learn to live in a society which is increasingly dominated by chemicals.

4. No drug, including aspirin, is completely safe in all circumstances.

5. There are many factors which influence the manner in which a person reacts to a drug. Avoid statements which imply that a given drug always produces identical effects in all individuals who take it.

6. It is unrealistic to expect schools to resolve all the problems associated with drug/alcohol use and abuse by youths. The task will require the cooperation of all community social and health agencies which have an interest in and some responsibility for the health and welfare of youths.

7. The activities which youths pursue between the end of the school day and bedtime influence their attitudes, values, and behavior patterns and may be in conflict with activities conducted during the school day. This fact has important ramifications for the community.

8. Relationships and/or understandings, particularly between teachers and students and parents and their children, must be improved.

9. Many knowledgeable persons feel that the better drug/alcohol programs focus on the concerns of youth, rather than specific drugs.

10. In relating to youths, all persons, including teachers, must realize that nonverbal communication may leave a more lasting impression than verbal.

11. In working with youths, it is important to develop a helping relationship; being friendly, sincere, and honest are necessary steps in establishing rapport.

12. Youths often seek approval for their actions in counseling situations. It is imperative that school personnel differentiate clearly between acceptance and approval of student actions.

13. School personnel should refrain from assuming responsibility for tasks for which they are unqualified. Persons working with youths with problems must know the community resources which offer services to youths and the procedures for making referrals.

ADMINISTRATION

School districts are regularly faced with problems related to alcohol/drug use and abuse by students. When incidents occur, they frequently create a crisis situation within the school and the community. A well-developed plan can be most helpful in approaching problems in a rational manner.

The ideas which follow should be helpful in resolving issues related to alcohol and drugs.

1. Schools should develop guidelines for dealing with individuals who may be suspected of using drugs/alcohol during the school day. Such plans should be worked out cooperatively among schools, health resources, boards of education, law enforcement officials, and social agencies which have specific responsibilities for serving youths with problems. The approved procedures must be explained to and understood by students, parents, school personnel, and involved community agencies.

2. When specific incidents involving drug/alcohol use occur during the school day, the following points should be kept in mind if the situation is to be resolved in a rational manner.

   A. Avoid panic; parents, school personnel, and community citizens must retain their composure.

B. Keep lines of communication open.

C. Avoid scare techniques.

D. Avoid creating an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion.

E. Avoid drug/alcohol stereotyping.

F. Use drug/alcohol education as a springboard to discussion.

G. Plan alternative student activities to drug/alcohol use and abuse.

3. School personnel do not have legally defined "privileged communication" rights as do doctors, lawyers, ministers, and priests. School personnel can be required to disclose certain types of information under circumstances specified by law. School personnel must describe clearly to youth the parameters of confidentiality under which they must work if a trusting, helping relationship is to be established.

PROGRAM

Schools face a challenge in developing alcohol/drug education programs. There are many possible approaches to presenting alcohol/drug education, and there is not a "best" approach. All instruction should be directed toward assisting students to make wise, responsible decisions relative to alcohol and drugs.

The following points should be of assistance in planning instructional programs.

1. Drug/alcohol education must be a sustained effort over a long period of time, and it must utilize a problem-solving approach.

2. It is relatively easy to improve knowledge. Getting students to incorporate knowledge into values, habits, attitudes, and practices is the real problem. Some schools have found values clarification, problem solving, and open dialogue between teachers and students to provide the most productive approach.

3. If teachers are to do an adequate job, they must have a wide variety of instructional materials available both for teachers and students. The instructional materials resources should be the heart of the program.

4. Persons teaching drug/alcohol education must know the scientific facts. Giving incorrect information to students will destroy teacher credibility and the instructional program.

5. As a primary goal, the instructional program should focus on assisting students to make wise personal decisions on all matters relating to health.

6. All educational programs should give credence to abstinence as a positive alternative to alcohol/drug use.

7. Alcohol/drug education should assist students in developing positive self images.

8. Instruction should help students accept consequences for their actions and assist them in modifing behavior to meet personal needs.

9. It is important to help youths look at options; however, they have the ultimate responsibility to make decisions.

10. Peer pressure is a very powerful force in the school setting. Such pressure can be positive or negative. Schools should help students discover ways to steer it into constructive channels.

11. Youths, at an early age, are forming values and attitudes which will determine to a large extent the future experiences they may have with drugs/alcohol. Drug/alcohol education is extremely important during Grades 4 through 8.

12. Alternatives to drug/alcohol use and abuse must be developed and made available to youths.

13. Children are not alike; school personnel must plan <u>with</u> rather than <u>for</u> them.

14. School personnel and parents must listen to youths and hear what they are saying, even though the process may sometimes be painful.

15. Every individual must be accepted and respected regardless of his/her personality and the problems he/she may present.

16. Each student should have some person in the school to whom he/she can turn with confidence in emergency situations.

17. Some school districts have found it helpful to organize an advisory council composed of representatives from local organizations, agencies, parents, and citizens to attack the problem of alcohol/drug use and abuse.

18. Evaluation techniques should be developed which will determine the extent to which the goals and objectives of the program are being accomplished.

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